



DIASPORA

(POST)COLONIAL VISIONS

7 April – 16 May 2014
Gulbenkian Café Gallery
Canterbury

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'Diaspora: (Post)colonial Visions' is part of the ongoing project 'Memory Matters', a partnership between the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research (University of Kent) and CORECOG, a Congolese community group based in East London. The exhibition documents the ways in which project participants, mostly British Congolese young people, engaged discursively and visually with the urban and socio-historical spaces of (post)colonial memories.

Through a series of heritage workshops organised in London and a 3-day visit to Brussels, several aspects of (post) colonial material representations and legacies were explored. In Brussels, the young people participated in an urban tour of the city's colonial monuments and a visit to the Royal Museum

for Central Africa (RMCA) a 'Little Versailles', dreamt by the Belgian king Leopold II to stage the grandeur of its colonial rule. Between 1885 and 1908 Leopold II was the sole owner of the 'Congo Free State', almost 80 times the size of Belgium. He implemented a harsh forced labour regime in the Congo to extract principally rubber as well as other natural riches.

Coined the 'only colonial museum left in the world', and still bearing the ubiquitous mark of Leopold II, the RCMA is now undergoing major refurbishment and renovation. The museum exhibits unique ethnographic collections but also showcases a whole universe of colonial fantasies. Civilising desires and animalised aesthetics of a 'primitive Other' are conveyed through decontextualized and a-temporal visions of an imagined

'Africa' - a 'Heart of Darkness' turned 'art of darkness'.

'Diaspora: (Post)colonial Visions' is also a witness to the struggle of Congolese activists in London, engaged in long-distance transnational politics and opposing the current Congolese government. Organising flashmobs, protests and demonstrations some of these activists denounce the exploitation of peoples and the plunder of mineral resources by a host of national and international actors, including multinational companies. Their public presence in the centre of London, at the heart of the 'global city' and former imperial capital, suggests the extent to which appropriating urban spaces and reclaiming visibility also serves to reconnect colonial past(s) and postcolonial present(s).

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Other partners: British Museum, The Royal Museum for Central Africa, Collectif Mémoire Coloniale et Lutte contre les Discriminations, Observatoire Ba ya ya, the Centre for Heritage at Kent (CH@K).

